DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 798 SO 015 659

AUTHOR Carranza, E. Lou
TITLE Pedagogics in Mexican American Studies.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS American Studies; Course Content; *Curriculum Development; Educational Strategies; Educational Theories; Higher Education; Instructional Development; Interdisciplinary Approach; Mexican Americans; Multicultural Education; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

A pedagogy appropriate to college level courses and comprised of interdisciplinary content, multidisciplinary faculty, and students from diverse academic backgrounds and with varying levels of skills merits development. A taxonomy of some of the difficulties in the construction of such a course in Mexican American studies, for example, focuses on five organizational areas: frame of reference, assumptions, elements, interpretations, and theories. Establishing an appropriate frame of reference requires a broad description of course content in order to establish course scope for the student. It also requires that the instructor be informed about the subject matter and have a clear concept of instructional purposes, strategies, and expectations for students. The assumptions, or presuppositions, about the course should be clearly stated at the outset of the course. These may include assumptions about such areas as the nature of man, history, or the purpose of life. The selection of elements refers to establishing key terms and concepts. The fourth consideration concerns interpretations, and models used to display them. An interpretation should be systematically consistent and exhibit a smooth empirical fit with the facts of the world. Finally, theories attempt to relate existent facts properly. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED243798

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
E. Lou Carranza
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Pedagogics in Mexican American Studies

by

E. Lou Carranza, Ph.D.

San Jose State University

1982

Introduction

A general approach to teaching the various courses offered in Mexican American Studies at the graduate and undergraduate levels poses more than a few difficulties for faculty trained in diverse disciplines. These difficulties can be resolved at a higher level of generality as a set of recommendations that will establish a common ground for instruction and learning regardless of the particular course, style of instruction, or faculty specialization. Although these remarks, in their generality, appeal to the entire range of inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary courses, what follows refers more appropriately to that portion of the curriculum known as Humanities in Chicano Studies. Within this broad field, I make reference to five areas for organizational focus which experience has revealed to be useful, if not necessary, to sound instruction: Frame of Reference, Assumptions, Elements, Interpretations, and Theories.

SP 015 659

Frame of Reference

The first of these essentials is the establishment of an appropriate Frame of Reference. By "appropriate" I mean both suitable for diverse courses or disciplines and adequate to the diverse levels of student academic skills. To be sure, the dangers of too broad or too narrow a Frame of Reference are matters for the instructor to judge and decide. This is no more than to place the responsibility for bounding the system of thought --the content of the course--where it belongs, with the instructor. The defined Frame of Reference requires, therefore, a sufficiently broad description of the course content to establish a "territory" with the boundaries or delimitations set forth as constraints which circumscribe the scope of inquiry. The degree of interest or enthusiasm of inquiry may on occasion serve to expand the scope beyond the boundaries of the Frame of Reference, and the instructor may wish to pursue such inquiry beyond the constraints to issues or topics related to the Frame of Reference. However, this venture beyond the Frame of Reference must be regulated to effect a return to the established Frame of Reference. The operating principle here would appear to favor flexibility that is suitably guided by a firm purpose to reiterate the content and scope of inquiry whenever necessary.

Other matters related to the establishment of an appropriate Frame of Reference address the responsibilities and expectations of the instructor. Both can be expressed, in part, by the objectives of the inquiry; however, these objectives, as

Arthur Combs suggests in his booklet, Educational Accountability: Beyond Behavioral Objectives, must be formulated and guided by considerations of professional responsibility. These include:

1. being informed in the subject matter,
2. being concerned about the student's welfare and progress,
3. understanding the behaviors of the students,
4. clearly understanding the instructional purposes to be carried out, and
5. carrying out the purposes with an appropriate set of strategies or methods.[1]

In sum,

> "Professional responsibility does not demand a prescribed way of behaving. What it does require is that whatever methods are used have the presumption of being good for the client. The emphasis is not upon guaranteed outcomes but on the defensible character of what is done. Doctors, for example,...are held responsible for...being able to defend in the eyes of their peers that whatever they did had the presumption of being helpful when applied. Teachers, too, must be prepared to stand this kind of professional scrutiny of their information, beliefs, purposes, and the adequacy of the techniques which they use. Whatever they do should be for some good and sufficient reason, defensible in terms of rational thought. This is an area of accountability sadly overlooked in most educational thinking."[2]

Similarly, instructor expectations should be explicitly addressed in a precise grading policy covering in detail the number and weight of each quiz, test, report, presentation, project or paper. A Frame of Reference which is appropriate by previous criteria, but lacking a rational, fair grading system keyed to the rigor and scholarship demanded by the level of course and difficulty of subject matter tends to undermine one or more of the professional responsibilities of the instructor, and perhaps by so doing, inadvertently destroys the efficacy of the Frame of Reference.

A final comment. Course description handouts are not substitutes for the establishment of an appropriate Frame of Reference, although their introduction could be used as an occasion to establish one.

The Assumptions

A second set of issues toward mapping a common ground for instruction and learning requires clear expression of whatever Assumptions guide the inquiry. These are the givens, the assumed-as-true or reliable set of presuppositions. Every system of thought is presumed to be based on a set of postulates which by definition are neither subject to proof nor denial, being assumed as true within that system. Of course, these assumptions should be discussed and questioned explicitly, stated succinctly, and clearly distinguished from personal and other beliefs, values, or commitments falling outside the established Frame of Reference.

The Assumptions may or may not incorporate world view assumptions about the nature of man; the purpose of life, the

meaning of death, time, history; the basis for morality; and the nature of prime reality. However, all well-rounded world views address at least these assumption-identifying questions. If the aim is to use one or more world views or models as methods for analysis and evaluation of the subject matter, rather than to merely explore and critique the subject matter or thought of a writer to attempt to determine an underlying world view, then these considerations should be incorporated as part of the Assumptions rather than as part of the Elements. In either event, much confusion can be avoided if the instructor specifies at the outset those presuppositions necessary as starting points for the inquiry that is to take place within the defined Frame of Reference.

The Elements

Selecting the Elements can prove to be at odds with the creation of a common ground for instruction and learning unless carefully considered from a student perspective. A relatively easy device, one that defines the elements, i.e., those key terms or concepts, the understanding of which is presupposed for any scholarly inquiry, is a glossary of terms. The glossary should comprise terms that have been selected as key constructs, i.e., sufficient and necessary for a scholarly inquiry. Selecting these elements is guided in part by the Assumptions and the defined Frame of Reference. Stipulative, lexical, precising, etc. definitions can be used to explicate the meanings of the Elements. However, to the extent that these definitions purpose the creation of special effects, thus granting them honorific status, they

should be classified as Assumptions rather than Elements. In the event that a term functions as both Assumption and Element, such as, for example, the term Pocho (in some contexts) this duality of functions, at a higher level of generality, becomes an ELEMENT. These terms require clear and detailed specification of the contexts in their application or use.

In stipulating that Elements are selected, I seek to discourage the notion that in some mysterious way they are given to us in the data. Elements are not the data, the givens; the givens are the Assumptions. Elements are more closely associated with the capta; their selection is guided by the data, the givens, in our Assumptions.

An additional feature that sets Assumptions apart from Elements is their arrangement. How the Elements are arranged, once selected, i.e., the order in which they are presented, used, or abused may spell out significantly different inferences or conclusions. No doubt the givens require as much precision as the Elements, but the givens may lack order or arrangement without thereby suffering a deficiency. Elements, on the other hand, form a set or subset within the Frame of Reference. Interaction between Elements constitutes an arrangement, an order of relations that represent organizational changes. These relations between the Elements will differ depending on the level of inquiry:

1. the epistemological level of inquiry,
2. the metaphysical level of inquiry, or
3. the axiological level of inquiry.

(More on these levels of inquiry in the next section.)

Both the kinds of relations that hold between Elements and the levels of inquiry serve to distinguish the Elements from the Assumptions. Thus, the Elements constitute capta, suggested in part by the Assumptions, but clearly distinguished from the givens in that Elements, as a subset or a set, display certain orders of relations or changes and are subject to different levels of inquiry.

In addition to the ordered relations that may hold between Elements, cybernetic relations of both positive and negative feedback within the Elements; between the Elements and variables exogenous to them but within the Frame of Reference; or between the Elements and variables exogenous to both the Elements and the Frame of Reference further distinguish the category of Elements from Assumptions.

The Interpretations

A fourth consideration concerns Interpretations and the models used to display them. These are deduced in large measure from the selection and arrangement of the Elements, but are also based on all that precedes the Interpretation. The complexity of an Interpretation(s) will most likely depend on the variety and diversity of Elements, the relations between them (including the variety and diversity of the relations) the purpose of the project or conceptualization and other approach related factors.

How is one to judge or evaluate an Interpretation, or judge between any two or more? While different disciplines may set forth diverse criteria, all ought to agree on at least these two

principles: (1) systematic consistency, and (2) smooth empirical fit.

The first, systematic consistency, tests an interpretation both for self-contradiction within, and contradiction with the Assumptions. Standard tests in logic for formal and informal fallacies should be applied. If our tests reveal inconsistency, this information ought to function as negative feedback for the revision and reconstruction of another Interpretation. This feedback process is also guided by the knowledge that our reconstructions of reality may only approach perfect consistency, and are therefore tentative and vulnerable to newer insight or additional discoveries. It should be kept in mind that the goal is <u>systematic</u> consistency.

The principle of smooth empirical fit questions the adequacy of the relation between our conceptualizations of reality, i.e., our Interpretations, and what is known about reality. In other words, an Interpretation may be systematically consistent and yet not correspond with the world as we know it. A lack of smooth empirical fit in and of itself must not be taken as the ultimate proof for the rejection of the Interpretation. Our knowledge of the world may be inaccurate or otherwise deficient. We admit that it will always be incomplete. On the other hand, smooth empirical fit in and of itself does not guarantee once and for all time an adequate Interpretation.

What is the value then of any Interpretation, assuming that it fulfills the requirement of smooth empirical fit? Merely this:

that one can justify or rationally support the claim of smooth empirical fit--no more, no less! That is, given that an Interpretation is systematically consistent and exhibits smooth empirical fit with the facts of our world, as we know it, the Interpretation has a claim on our credibility. For example, given two Interpretations, each being systematically consistent (and both satisfying other approach criteria) our choice of one over the other will rest on the one that fits the facts best. If two Interpretations fulfill both criteria "equally," then they are competing Interpretations.

We know that Interpretations may also be rendered as models. Our models should exhibit "epistemological vividness," i.e., they ought to display the Elements and their relations in such a manner that they depict how our Interpretation fits the facts. In fact, depicting the Elements and their relations in a model already announces the possibility of drawing them in a manner that fits the facts of (1) the epistemological, (2) the metaphysical, or (3) the axiological levels of inquiry.

The epistemological level of inquiry comprises the systematic study of the nature, sources, and validity of what is claimed to be knowledge. For example, Epistemology asks, "Do we know an independent world or merely our experience?" Our responses to this question can be grouped into either subjectivistic or objectivistic theories depending on the degree of emphasis on the observer or the observed. It should be noted that Epistemology differs from Logic and from Psychology.

> "Logic is concerned with the specific and formal problem of correct reasoning, whereas epistemology deals with the nature of reasoning, with truth, and with the processes of knowing themselves....Psychology is concerned primarily with descriptive study of behavior, phenomena, and the like, whereas epistemology deals with our claim to knowledge, with what we mean by 'knowing'."[3]

Metaphysical inquiry, for those who distinguish two main branches of philosophy, epistemology and ontology, is usually classified with the latter, i.e., theory of being. In other words, metaphysics and ontology are sometimes used synonymously. For others, metaphysics denotes both ontology and epistemology. Our preference conforms to the use of ontology as roughly synonymous with metaphysics.

As such, metaphysical inquiry comprises the systematic study of the origin and nature of the physical world, life, and prime reality. The pertinent questions are:

> "What is the physical world? (Answers state theories of physical reality.) What is life? (Answers state theories of the origin and nature of living reality.) What is ultimately real? (Answers state theories of the nature of reality as such, i.e., ontology.)"[4]

While epistemology and metaphysics address the nature of knowledge and reality, respectively, axiological investigation undertakes a systematic study of theory of values of all types. The pertinent questions are:

"Is value a quality, a relation, or an attitude? Is value found or made? Is value definable? Analyzable? Reducible? If so, to what?"[5]

In other words, axiology includes aesthetics, ethics, and certain "special" philosophies, e.g., philosophy of religion, for those who posit the source of value in religion.

Finally, it should be noted that each level of inquiry ought to include clearly distinguished descriptive and explanatory accounts in recognition of the fact that to describe what is the case may or may not also tell us why it came to be. Explanation so often leans, nay rests, on "description"--does it not?

Theories

The use of models, representations that carry epistemological vividness, are an especially vital ingredient for many theories, especially those that function like nets. Karl Popper, for one, thought of theories as "nets cast to catch what we call 'the world': to rationalize, to explain, and to master it."[6]

Less picturesque but in a similar vein, Hanson's comment on theories is worth quoting in full.

"Physical theories provide patterns within which data appear intelligible. They constitute a 'conceptual Gestalt.' A theory is not pieced together from observed phenomena; it is rather what makes it possible to observe phenomena as being of a certain sort, and as related to other phenomena. Theories put phenomena into systems. They are built up in 'reverse'--

retroductively. A theory is a cluster of conclusions in search of a premise. From the observed properties of phenomena the physicist reasons his way towards a keystone idea from which the properties are explicable as a matter of course."[7]

"Retroduction" or "abduction" appears to be the link between deductive and inductive thinking in scientific theory formation. The philosopher, Peirce, distinguished the three in this way:

"Abduction consists in studying facts and devising a theory to explain them....Deduction proves that something must be; Induction shows that something actually is operative; Abduction merely suggests that something may be."[8]

In theorizing, as with any intellectual or scholarly discourse, it is important, in the interest of avoiding confusion and enhancing clarity of thought, to recall the differences between inductive, deductive, and abductive summaries of statements. Of equal importance are (1) the distinction between object-language and metalinguistic uses of terms, and (2) differences between observation statements and pattern statements. Also, we should always keep in mind that,

"theories do not create facts; rather they attempt to relate existent facts properly....The theory maker must never suppose that he is building reality; his task is the fascinating but more humble one of shaping a 'conceptual fabric' that, with 'epistemological

vividness,' will correctly mirror the world of substantive reality."[9]

Summary

A pedagogy appropriate to teaching a curriculum comprising interdiscipline content, multidiscipline faculty, and students from diverse academic backgrounds and with varying levels of skills awaits further development. My purpose has been merely to provide a taxonomy of some of the difficulties or challenges toward the construction and development of a pedagogy appropriate to courses in Mexican American Studies, and in particular, a segment of its curriculum known as Humanities in Chicano Studies.

The following chart summarizes these efforts by associating each category with a "principle," or, less formally, a reminder that all our efforts are forever incomplete.

/chart/

Finally, I borrow from John Warwick Montgomery a parable which admirably captures the essence of my remarks on pedagogy.

"Once upon a time...there was a man who thought he was dead. His concerned wife and friends sent him to the friendly neighborhood psychiatrist. The psychiatrist determined to cure him by convincing him of one fact that contradicted his belief that he was dead. The fact the psychiatrist settled on was the simple truth that dead men do not bleed, and he put the patient to work reading medical texts, observing autopsies, etc. After weeks of effort, the patient

A Taxonomy of Ideas On Pedagogy

CATEGORIES	PRINCIPLES
FRAME OF REFERENCE	"Bad Boundaries make for ineffective Frames of Reference."
ASSUMPTIONS	"As a man thinketh, so is he."
ELEMENTS	"Everything is connected to everything else."
INTERPRETATIONS	"A disembodied interpretation may prove to be an idle and harmful fiction."
THEORIES	"A theory conceptually maps a bit of reality."

finally said, 'All right, all right! You've convinced me. Dead men do not bleed.' Whereupon the psychiatrist stuck him in the arm with a needle, and the blood flowed. The man looked with a contorted, ashen face and cried: 'Good Lord! Dead men bleed after all!"[10]

In this parable Montgomery has succinctly captured, in my view, all the categories: Frame of Reference, Assumptions, Elements, Interpretations, and Theory.

NOTES

[1]Arthur Combs, Educational Accountability: Beyond Behavioral Objectives (Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1972), pp. 37-37.

[2]Ibid., pp. 37-38.

[3]Milton D. Hunnex, Philosophies and Philosophers (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1961), p. 3.

[4]Ibid., p. 14.

[5]Ibid., p. 20.

[6]Karl R. Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery, 2nd ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 59.

[7]N. R. Hanson, Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 90.

[8]Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), vol. 5, para. 144 and 171, pp. 90 and 106.

[9]John Warwick Montgomery, The Suicide of Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1970), p. 273.

[10]Ibid., p. 122.